

Management Plan Review

Spring 2011

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (sanctuary) protects humpback whales and their habitat around the main Hawaiian Islands. The sanctuary works to achieve this goal through scientific research, education, public outreach, resource protection, and by facilitating observance of federal and state laws that prohibit disturbing these endangered marine mammals.

Congress established the sanctuary in 1992 via the Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary Act (HINMSA). Full designation of the sanctuary was accomplished upon completion of the first management plan in June of 1997. This plan was later reviewed in 2002 through a process that included public review and comment. The sanctuary has since undertaken another management plan review (MPR) process to address current and emerging issues and to increase management effectiveness.

What is a Management Plan and why is it being reviewed?

A sanctuary management plan is a site-specific planning and management document that describes the goals, objectives, and management activities for a sanctuary. Management plans generally outline regulations, describe boundaries, identify staffing and budget needs, and set priorities and performance measures for resource protection, research, and outreach and education programs.

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is required by law to periodically review sanctuary management plans to ensure that sanctuary sites continue to conserve, protect, and enhance their nationally significant living and cultural resources. This allows the site to include new and relevant place-based and scientific information and advances in marine resource management to ensure that current issues are being addressed. The public is encouraged to participate and comment during the MPR process.

How was the process initiated?

The identification of marine resources in addition to humpback whales and their habitat was stipulated by Congress in the 1992 HINMSA. During the 2002 management plan review and revision process, numerous public comments were received requesting the sanctuary to increase its scope to include the conservation and management of additional resources. In 2007, the sanctuary and State of Hawai'i produced a report entitled "Assessment of Additional Resources for Possible Inclusion in the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary". Governor Linda Lingle responded with a letter on February 28, 2008 to express her support for considering other marine mammals and sea turtles for possible inclusion to the sanctuary.

What has been accomplished so far?

In response to the Congressional mandate, the Governor's support, and public input, the sanctuary has implemented a process to engage communities and explore, among other issues, the possibility of increasing the scope of the sanctuary to include other marine resources in addition to humpback whales. The sanctuary advisory council hosted a workshop to reach out to the public as well as to inform stakeholders about opportunities to participate in MPR. In addition, the sanctuary held 8 information meetings around the state prior to the official scoping period. On July 14, 2010, a notice of intent was published in the Federal Register Notice to officially (1) initiate the review of the sanctuary management plan and its regulations, (2) announce the 90-day public scoping and comment period, (3) announce 10 public scoping meetings held on 6 islands across the state, and (4) provide public notice of NOAA's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and a management plan. During the 90-day public scoping period the sanctuary received more than 12,300 submissions via email, mail, fax and voicemail, including comments that were verbally provided during the public scoping meetings.

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What were the outcomes of the scoping process?

The scoping process engaged a diverse constituency including agencies, organizations, elected officials, and community members from throughout Hawai'i, the US mainland, and around the world. Comments received during the official public scoping period represented a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints. Sanctuary staff organized over 12,300 submissions and those relating to similar topics were grouped together. Due to the diversity of the comments, staff developed three main categories to further organize the comments: List of Issues, Potential Solutions and Overarching Considerations. Comments focusing on current or emerging concerns were categorized in the List of Issues whereas comments that could potentially be used to address a certain issue have been identified as Potential Solutions. Comments grouped as Overarching Considerations are fundamental to marine resource conservation and management in Hawai'i, so they need to be effectively considered when addressing each of the issues. The following list summarizes the different categories, in alphabetical order:

List of Issues

- Climate Change
- Ecosystem Protection: Species & Habitats
- Enforcement
- Humpback Whale Protection
- Management Effectiveness
- Marine Animal Assessment & Response
- Maritime Heritage
- Native Hawaiian Culture
- Ocean Literacy
- Offshore Development
- Water Quality

Potential Solutions

- Boundaries & Zones
- Outreach & Education
- Regulations
- Research

Overarching Considerations

- Community Engagement
- Environmental Impacts
- Native Hawaiian Traditional Perspectives
- Socioeconomic - Ocean Users - Livelihoods - Access

What are working groups and how do they support the process?

Working groups have been formed to address the issues that were identified from the comments. The sanctuary advisory council established working groups to further examine each issue while also taking into account each of the Overarching Considerations and Potential Solutions. Working groups are composed of advisory council members, stakeholders, technical experts and interested members of the community. Ultimately, working groups will provide the council with a list of recommendations on how to address the issue in the future. The working groups are open to the public and will facilitate public participation by gathering input from relevant constituent groups, and providing progress updates via the sanctuary's website.

What happens following the scoping period?

Action Plans: The sanctuary advisory council will provide a list of recommendations to sanctuary management that will be taken into consideration for the development of action plans. The action plans will form the foundation of the draft management plan.

Draft Management Plan: The draft management plan will contain action plans that address identified issues and will outline management of the sanctuary. Additionally, it may also propose regulatory changes. The sanctuary will provide additional opportunities for the public to comment on the draft management plan.

Environmental Assessment: Federal and state agencies will conduct a full environmental assessment, as required by law, to address any potential environmental impacts resulting from the proposed actions in the draft management plan.

Final Management Plan: Following a public comment period, the ONMS will make any necessary changes prior to issuing the final management plan. The proposed management plan, regulations, and any recommendations concerning the addition of other marine resources in the sanctuary must receive final approval from the Governor of Hawai'i.

How can you stay engaged?

Find out more online at hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov or contact the sanctuary office at 1.888.55.WHALE. Also, visit us online to subscribe to the management plan review listserv to receive e-updates about the process.